

Editorial for ProPEL Special Issue

This Special Issue of Studies in Continuing Education presents a selection of papers originally presented at the fourth Professional Practice, Education and Learning (*ProPEL*) conference, hosted by the University of Technology Sydney in December 2019. *ProPEL*¹ is a collaborative, multi-professional international network (launched in 2010 at the University of Stirling) to promote research and knowledge exchange in issues of professional education, practice and learning.

The theme of the 2019 conference was *Provocations and possibilities in professional practice, education, and learning* aiming to shine a light on the unspoken, unasked, and intangible, and embracing the creative, emerging and unexpected. The aim was to invite participants to extend the conversations from the previous conference in 2017 where there was a significant interest in the changing nature of professional practice, and the 'practice' of learning emerged as noted by Fenwick (2018), as well as foci on messiness, coordination work, and objects; time and temporality as overlooked actors organising practices; and the need for nuanced approaches to differentiating expertise in ways that keep the notion closer to practice (Albrandt Dahlgren et al, 2018). As a result, many of the questions that vexed presenters in that 2017 conference remained pressing in 2019, including questions of how practice gets done, the learning that happens in the course of practice, and the learning that needs to happen for those who are not-yet professionals (and indeed, whether this is an appropriate way to frame initial professional education).

This Special Issue includes papers that represent the diversity of ideas explored as much as the participants engaging with them. Within the papers that follow are studies that focus on diverse professions including teaching, engineering, medicine, architecture, law, allied health, early childhood education, and sports coaching, plus methodological papers exploring research practice itself. Authors include distinguished professors, research students, and practitioners, some working alone, others in collaborative teams, from around the world.

So, what of provocation? In a reflective and conversational piece, Kemmis (this issue) appears to even surprise himself on reaching the conclusion that learning is not, in itself, a practice. We take Kemmis' argument as suggesting that vexed questions of the relationships between education and practice cannot simply be resolved by collapsing one onto the other through a notion of learning as practice. How the practices of professional education and professional work can and should connect remains a key focus of much work in this field, complicated by the need to address this connection without creating artificial bifurcations between separate worlds that need 'bridging'. Instead, a sense of becoming and the in-between, of emergence rather than structure, and what is on the edge of being seen came through in the conference. Papers by Stewart et al (this issue), Clerke et al (this issue), Maclean (this issue) and Fawns et al (this issue) tackle this through concepts of space, praxis, and seamful learning respectively.

Further provocation comes in the form of Gherardi's (this issue) methodological challenge. Drawing our attention precisely to what is unseen, Gherardi urges us to dwell in shadowy

spaces as researchers working with data, resisting the urge for finality and resolution, instead enacting practices that treat data as 'not-yet'. New understandings of professional practice, education and learning might become available by embracing data that are illegible and invisible in plain sight, by actively seeking data that is not-yet manufactured in and confronting uncomfortable knowledges, and by acknowledging the power dynamics of infrastructures that shape the indeterminacy of not-yet data. The challenge is to dwell in and with these uneasy and unstable forms of data, to go slowly in these troublesome, productively disruptive and disruptively productive spaces. Again, themes of emergence and the in-between come through, here around the possibility of data as unfolding (and becoming tired), and with meaning arising in assemblages between researchers and data. This is also evident in Oosterhoff et al's (this issue) paper, whose unruly study led to ontological shifts and a heterogeneous methodological approach.

What of possibilities? Gherardi's notion of not-yet data also seeks to find new ways to shed light on what might be important but easy to miss. Kemmis' 'non-conventional' view draws our attention explicitly to 'coming to practise differently', which we suggest can be taken up in a critical or emancipatory ethos where researchers are not passive bystanders observing change, but can actually be part of it, leading change, with others.

Together, the papers accomplish and provoke further rethinking that creates possibilities. Rethinking how we think about practice and learning (Kemmis), what it means to be 'ready' for the classroom as a teacher (Stewart et al), what work-integrated learning might look like (Clerke et al), and how professional education might address a capacity for dynamically developing unpredictable practices, going beyond what is pre-specified or a conservative notion of 'adaption' (Fawns et al). We also see rethinking of methodology, most explicitly in Gherardi's and Oosterhoff et al's papers, but also through the use of theories of space (Stewart et al), practice architectures (Clerke et al), and those taking up posthuman or sociomaterial approaches (Maclean, Fawns et al).

Finally, we note that at the time of the fourth ProPEL conference, Sydney was choking on the smoke from bushfires, and we had yet to hear of Covid-19. These events show us more than ever that we need to do more than adapt to the status quo, but to be looking for possibilities that we have yet to consider. This strikes at the core of what it is to practice, to educate and to learn, and is a feature we hope to see grow in the field of professional practice, education and learning.

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Nick Hopwood
Ann Reich
Donna Rooney
Jacqui McManus

Endnote

¹The ProPEL Network includes university-based researchers and doctoral students who are interested in researching matters of interest across a wide range of occupational groups that call themselves 'professions' including health care, policing, social care, public education, management and organisation studies, and creative industries.

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